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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S IFTAR REMARKS ON THE COAST

REF: NAIROBI 4334

¶1. The Ambassador hosted an Iftar dinner in Mombasa, Kenya's port town and a center of its Islamic culture, on September 26 (reftel), early in the Islamic holy month of Ramadhan. The dinner was attended by an overflow crowd of Kenyan Muslim dignitaries, including the Chief Khadi (judge and scholar of religious law), prominent businessmen and women, and founders and officials of a variety of non-governmental organizations. During a dinner marked by warm atmospherics and a wide-ranging exchange of views, the Ambassador delivered the well-received remarks that follow.

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Text of Iftar Remarks  
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¶2. Peace be with you all. Good evening. I'm grateful to everyone here for sharing with me this bountiful Iftar dinner, and for affording me this opportunity to exchange ideas with such a distinguished group on the shared future of the United States and Kenya.

Tonight, I am honored to have you with me as you break the fast that is part of the observance of the holy month of Ramadan. This month is set apart in the Muslim faith as a time to remember in a special way first that our existence itself is a gift that comes to us rather than something we create for ourselves and, second, that this visible, material world is not the total of our lives. It is a time to remember the poor, and to draw near to God. People of all faiths can share in these aspirations, and I share them with you.

I have come to the Coast to listen and learn. I want to open a dialogue with various religious and traditional leaders, including Muslim leaders, to better understand your communities. I believe that you here in this room are among the best people to set us on the path to deepen the partnership between the U.S. and Kenya, which is my goal. I do this in the firm conviction that this partnership is mutually beneficial for our two countries.

I was formerly the U.S. Ambassador to Mali, where I became good friends with the Grand Imams of the great mosques of Djenne and Timbuktu. It was during that time that I first became acquainted with Muslim culture and traditions. I was a very strong supporter of the American efforts to help preserve ancient Islamic manuscripts in Timbuktu and other areas. These efforts included the "Ink Road" project in Mali. The term "Ink Road" comes from the practice of ancient Islamic scholars, known as "ambassadors of peace," who would travel widely using the Koran and their skills at mediation and arbitration to settle disputes among warring groups. Their decisions would be documented in manuscripts that are now held in archives worldwide. Using U.S. Government funding, we were able to mobilize international support for the preservation of manuscripts that document this extraordinary tradition. These efforts have helped illuminate the important theme in Islam of promoting peace and enlightenment.

In some small way, I hope I can emulate this tradition in my own efforts to promote democracy and prosperity here, and to work with Kenya to foster peace and stability in the Horn of Africa region. But first I must learn from you and other members of Kenyan society in order to understand the complexities and realities of this great country. As I said in my statement before the Senate for my confirmation as Ambassador to Kenya, it is important that democracy in Kenya embrace the full diversity of this country, including rich and poor, Muslims and Christians, and the array of ethnic groups.

I am looking forward to opportunities to talk with each of you as part of what I hope will prove to be a constructive, frank, and lasting dialogue. The people of the United States and Kenya, and our respective governments, both benefit from this kind of dialogue. By working to understand one another we are helping to strengthen learning, communities, and organizations that go to the heart and soul of what makes our countries great. I am pleased to be able to inform you that the United States has invested millions of dollars on the Coast to fight the scourage of HIV/AIDS, and to promote development, good government, and education. I pledge to you that the United States will continue its engagement on the Coast as part of the growing U.S.-Kenyan partnership.

Ahsanteni NA Mungu AWABARIKI! (NOTE: Swahili for "thank you, and may God bless you." END NOTE.)

HOOVER